

THE PLATFORM

By Shaun Kearney

When I was a Pastor I appraised the worth of each young person under my care that aspired to ministry, by how I thought they would present themselves on the platform. I did this because it was the way I had seen it done. It was the way I thought it had to be done, and it was the way in which I am sure I was evaluated.

The underlying belief is, that if you are going to be able to make your mark and get somewhere, you will eventually have your own pulpit; but to get a pulpit is not that easy. You will need to impress your mentor and have his unqualified support. In addition you must learn to dot every “i” and cross every “t”, in other words don’t make any waves.

I knew a number of outstanding students who attended Bible School that excelled in their studies. They were intelligent, diligent and dedicated, and loved the Lord as much as any, but because they lacked charisma; did not possess good platform skills they were regarded as not having what it takes to become a good preacher, and so they were passed over. They were never told as much in so many words, but they were looked upon as unsuitable material and would never make the grades to be a pastor in their religious movement. Good communication skills were (and still are) considered unquestionably the most important pre-requisite for public ministry. To be able to hold the attention of a group of people for 30-45 minutes was deemed imperative.

These criteria may not be a great requirement in some denominations, but in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles they are essential, without them nobody is going to go very far. And of course, there is less room for anyone with an impediment; I am not talking about spiritual shortcomings; they don’t seem to weigh in very heavily in Pentecostal circles.

Over the years multiplied thousands of eager young men and women, fervent in Spirit, and filled with a burning desire to serve the Lord have been attracted by slick advertisements to attend Bible Colleges. Many of these colleges were attached to large churches. The bulk of those that attend eventually become casualties of pulpit mania. In quick time most give up chasing the ministry myth; secretly feeling like failures. Others

have given up on any church involvement anywhere on a regular basis. after all if you can't be a "pastor" what else is there besides being the preachers dogsbody? (Some refer to it as his "armour bearer"; give me break please).

The numerical increase some churches enjoyed that I could name was due solely to transfer growth. Hundreds of hopeful Christians who came from around the world to attend their Colleges, with the dream of becoming a professional preacher now just polish a church pew. Many met their life partner there, and that's fine, but gradually they became disillusioned as the realisation sunk into their hearts and minds that it just wasn't going to happen for them. Nobody was going to give them a church. They were never going to get their own platform unless they took courage and stepped out on their own. When I lived in California it was said that more people held Real Estate licences than any other legal document. Well the same could be said for Bible College Diplomas, because thousands who hold them just sit like dummies in congregations enduring the happy hour every Sunday morning. Then there are just as many who although they graduated at a Christian College, have now become cynical about all religious systems, knowing that they were duped. People over 40 with any real "Grey Matter" between their ears are becoming harder to find in Pentecostal circles.

It stands to reason that only so many people can fit on any one Platform at the same time, and the likelihood of you being one of them is very slim indeed.

The insidious trap behind all these financial sacrifices made in the hope of achieving the goal of having your own church is rarely discerned. To have a platform from which to launch out and perform great deeds for God is a myth. At best it's a great gamble, its one that will eventually cost you dearly because it just isn't going to happen for most believers. The losers in this game of chance, number in the thousands. Many become bitter and totally disenchanted with Christianity. However there are some success stories so don't loose hope, because if your natural father has a church he might give it to you when he's ready to retire.

It's called Nepotism. Amie Semple McPherson gave her church to her son Ralph, and although he headed up the Four Square Pentecostal movement for many years, (I was told by an "insider") that Ralph never did receive the Pentecostal experience. Jack Hayford gave his church to his daughter and son-in-law. Oral Roberts handed over his organization to his son Richard. Pat Robertson is setting up his son Gordon to inherit his empire. Kevin Conner gave his kingdom to his son Mark. Charles Green in New Orleans passed his on to his son Michael. John Mears of Washington D.C. passed his church on to his son Donnie; James Beall in Detroit inherited his church from his mother. Violet Kitley of Oakland California handed her domain over to her son David, and now he is in the process of giving it to his son Patrick. Coleman Phillips of Escondido California did likewise for his two sons one of which shortly afterwards disgraced him. Dick Benjamin of Anchorage Alaska gave his to his boy Rick.

We could go on and on. The modus operandi of the owners of these charismatic religious businesses is similar to that of a constitutional monarchy, where the King's son succeeds

him to the throne. Fathers if at all possible will ensure that their offspring inherit their empire, and so will do whatever it takes to make sure it stays within the family. They will emphatically resist any democratic process, and then set about to enshrine themselves in a constitution that ensures that they will have the right to appoint a successor to their religious dynasty. These novices encouraged by their adoring parents believe emphatically in their inalienable, incontrovertible, indisputable right to succeed their fathers in the family business. In no time they are swallowed up in a fog of their own importance to God, for the benefit of their people.

The fact that we are all slaves, not slave owners; that we have been bought with a price, and that we do not belong to pastors, or religious institutions, to be sent hither and yon at their bidding seems to have completely slipped their minds these great ones. Instead congregational zombies toil away in religious factories fulfilling the dreams of their overlords (and paying for that privilege I might add). Ask any honest Christian who has ever worked for one of these large religious organizations and they will tell you that the leaders consider themselves a cut above everyone else. They want 10% of your income to use however they feel inclined; to travel first class; drive a new car; be addressed by a title; live in an expensive home, be complimented over their sermons and be obeyed without question. If you can ever get close to them you will find that many are irritable, rude, carnal, and almost unapproachable. There are more problems in the pulpit than in the pew. The clergy are in damage control worldwide and yet the people still follow them blindly.

Joyce Meyers has members of her family firmly ensconced in her religious business; living on astronomical salaries drawn from the proceeds of money fleeced from stupid, carnal, lazy saints. Why bring family members in? Why not? Besides it's dangerous to bring outsiders into the business. If you don't believe me go on line and see for yourself.

Many of these institutions have colossal multimillion-dollar turnovers to play with. They are wealthy beyond imagination compared with the people they claim to serve. But despite all that money, they cannot say as did Peter and John, to the lame man at gate beautiful, "silver and gold have I none," and neither can they say, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth arise and walk".

Who financed these businesses? Silly saints did, and there's plenty more where that came from. Truly fools and their money are soon parted. These individuals practice the doctrine of Balaam, and like the false prophet their motto is, "the end justifies the means". They all have a big surprise in store, just as Balaam found out.

Mark 10:35-45.

"And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that you would **do for us** whatsoever we desire. **Sounds familiar.** And he said unto them, what would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us **that we may sit**, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, **in thy glory**. But Jesus said unto them, ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, we can, and Jesus said

unto them, ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized”:

They certainly did, for all died the death of a martyr. “But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, ye know that they, which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But **it shall not be like that among you**: but whosoever will be **great** among you, shall be your **servant**: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be the **doulos**, (slave) of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

In the judgement of scripture, it is undeniably clear, that the love of position, admiration and praise, is basically corrupt. For it tends to exalt and inflate us; to pride ourselves on our natural or acquired endowments; to assume credit and merit for our own qualities. It chooses **self-esteem** instead of ascribing all honour and glory where they are due. It’s false, because it exalts that which we should demean. It’s criminal, because it intrudes upon the domain of God. And we have all done it at times.

Here are some things people believe is the way to greatness.

The Pulpit: There is no place where “**pulpit mania**” is more contagious than in Pentecostal circles. Pastors are the select of the elect, lost in a fog of their own importance. So young singles and couples make it their goal to go to Bible School to become pastors. It may not be said so openly, but it soon becomes clear, that the only way you will get to be somebody is to become a pastor. In Pentecost, as soon as some high profile individual is saved, he is adjudged clergy material. It happened to Darren Beadman the most celebrated jockey in Australia. These trophies of grace, despite the fact they are novices are promoted around the franchises of the particular movement that snared them for the purpose of attracting new members.

When I asked a young pastor with a small congregation what his goal was, without hesitation, he told me it was to have a church of a 1000 people. No doubt he felt this was the way to serve God. It would generate enough finance to enable him to do all that was on his heart. I was no different at his age.

Jeremiah 45:5. “Seeketh thou great things for thyself? Seek them not” was the word of the Lord to Baruch. In “Death of a salesman” Arthur Miller says of Willie Loman,

“He’s writing his name in a block of ice on a hot day.”

That really sums it up. We forget, that we are all too soon forgotten. Where has the servant spirit found in Mark 10 gone? It has been replaced by a total commitment to our own personal needs, and a complete lack of concern for the needs of the other person. I have seen that those who have been pastors for a number of years eventually, begin to dream of becoming an itinerant preacher. This naturally is the next step up the corporate

ladder. Statements like; “He’s being released to the body” in reality, means, he is going to travel among the branches of his franchise. To these ministers, “the body” is their denomination or movement. Many choose for themselves the title of evangelist, or prophet, and in recent times we have been getting quite a few Apostles. I am not being facetious but stating the plain facts.

**Church has become a lucrative business nowadays.
That’s why many have Bank machines in the foyer.**

Ambition: Is the desire for power, fame and honour. It means wanting your life to count for something. There’s nothing wrong with that. We should all want our lives to amount to something. Paul said “I have fought a good fight”, the only good fight is the one you win. “I have kept the faith.” “I have finished my course, and won my race, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown, and not for me only, but for all those that love Him.” Victors Crowns are not door prizes handed out on the way in. They are reserved for overcomers”.

It’s not Christian to drift aimlessly like flotsam and jetsam.

But every one of us must strive lawfully. Jesus said, “I have finished the work you gave me to do”. Not what He wanted to do, but what He was given to do. Jesus was ambitious to do His father’s will. We must never forget that we have no right to take matters into our own hands. We can see how much of this has gone on when we look at the countless catastrophic failures the clergy is responsible for.

Everyone has this urge to improve his or her station in life. However, the modern notion of success and excellence is a very suspect one indeed. It assumes you’re “okay” because you made it to the top, but if you didn’t, you’re not “okay”.

When your main preoccupation is to fulfil your ambitions, and reach your goals, to the point that you can’t hear the heart cry of your brother or sister who is in pain, then your zeal and motivation is questionable. Ambition is the desire to excel, but it should never be at somebody else’s expense. The great American dream of success, prestige, money, power and security, is self-serving and not the spirit of Christ. “Christ never pleased Himself.” Romans 15:3

Position: “You don't know what you're asking!” “To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give: but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.” We are naturally selfish. Serving others does not come spontaneously. To develop lasting and co-operative relationships we must be willing to serve. When recognition and honour comes our way, it is acceptable when it has not been solicited. It is given by God to comfort us, in the knowledge that our service has not gone unnoticed. It should be a stimulus to further service in the cause of Christ, and not for self-aggrandizement. We had a businessman in our congregation who burst into tears, because he wasn't appointed an elder. He missed the whole point of Jesus ministry. He left and joined a local Pentecostal church that quickly accommodated him. When the prophetic seminars were in full flight, I kept bumping into people, who told me they had been to the school of the prophets and

as such were now prophets. I seemed to keep running across men who wanted to be called pastor who didn't have a flock, and prophets without a prophecy, and teachers that nobody wanted to listen to. In the true church of Jesus Christ there is no place for position hunters, there are only vacancies for servants.

The servant's prayer is "What wilt thou have me to do?"

The prodigal's prayer was, "**Make** me as a hired servant."

LUKE'S ACCOUNT 22: 14-27

In veiled words He speaks of the traitor.

"But, behold, the hand of him that betrayed me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed! And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing."

In Matthew's account they became exceedingly sorrowful at the news and began to say "Is it I." And so the following account is hard to imagine yet it is accurate and true, and is most certainly there for our consideration.

"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest."

It is sad to think that the disciples would stoop to such a thing in the light of all that was taking place that night. His body hasn't even been laid to rest and yet here they are squabbling over positions and power.

What an hour to have strife. At the very time that they should have been concerned about Christ and His sufferings we see this ugly incident. What did they care about His sufferings? Moods seemed to swing that night between sorrow and grasping for power and authority. To have strife was bad enough, but to have so little concern over Him, and to be seen striving over who is going to take over after He died is a disgrace. How often we have seen the same devilish spirit manifested in religious circles over position, power and authority. Christ taught on this subject time and again in His earthly pilgrimage; will we ever learn the lessons that Jesus taught?

Christ tells the disciples to be humble as a little child. A child is an imitator, a listener, a learner and a servant, rather than an authority figure, or a teacher or one that commands.

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye are converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:1-4.

The Great Servant addresses this recurring problem once again.

“And He said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; (a child) and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sits at meat, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at meat? But I am among you as he that serves.” Luke 22:25-27.

This is forever His answer to this power grabbing attitude that is still plaguing the church and holding on to numerous pulpits. Many leadership conferences are quite sickening affairs, and much of what is taught is geared towards the man and his ministry.

“The strength and power of human leadership has been most destructive to those that have exercised it as well as those who have come under it. It has been one of the greatest hindrances of their going on with the Lord.”

Man’s standard of greatness is to be served; God’s is to serve.

Man’s standard is to get; God’s is to give.

Man’s standard is to take; God’s is to lay it down.

Man’s is to exalt himself; God’s to humble oneself.

Failure to obey God’s principles caused Lucifer to elevate himself the consequences of which will eventually destroy him.

“At the last Passover Christ washed His disciples' feet exhorting them to humility and charity”

John 13:1-7. And (the preparations for) supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He rises from supper, laid aside His garments; took a towel, and girded Himself. He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. He came to Simon Peter: and Peter said to Him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered Him, What I do you know not now; but you shall know hereafter.”

There’s a place of new beginnings

A place to start again

A place of understanding help

A place to bring our pain

A place for disappointments,

Shattered dreams and shrivelled hopes.

There’s a place just off the fast lane

Or as you hurtle slippery slopes.

This place is not a mystic dream,

Ideology or ideal;

For at the cross of Calvary

Christ’s identification with us is for real

Natalie Joy Arnett.